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ABSTRACT

In this analysis of vocational preparation for women material is presented to substantiate the claim that women are joining the labor force in increasing numbers and their career opportunities are expanding, but that the educational system has failed to respond. Statistical data is cited showing that women have traditionally been employed in just a few low-paying jobs and that they should seek careers in traditionally male-dominated fields. The laws relating to sex equality in employment are discussed, as well as the socialization forces which push women into a highly-restricted vision of their role. Evidence is presented that schools heavily reinforce the traditional sex-role stereotypes in course offerings, curriculum materials, guidance and counseling programs, and other aspects of school life. In addition, recommendations are presented for changes in the educational system to make it more responsive to the real needs of women students. (BB)

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VOCATIONAL PREPARATION FOR WOMEN: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

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VOCATIONAL PREPAPATION FOR WOMEN:

A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

by JoAnn M. Steiger, Ed.D.

December 1974

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STATE OF ILLINOIS
BOARD OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND REHABILITATION
DIVISION OF VOCATIONAL AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION
RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT UNIT

Steiger, Fink & Smith, Inc.
6723 Towne Lane Road
McLean, Virginia 22101

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INTRODUCTION

Women are joining the labor force in increasing numbers and their career opportunities are expanding, but the education system has failed to respond. Women are still encouraged by the schools to prepare solely for the role of homemaker or for dead end, low paying jobs in traditionally female occupations.

Almost all women in the United States work for pay at some time in their lives, and about half the female population is employed at any one time. The main factor that seems to prevent women from working, the presence of young children at home, is being reduced in two ways: women are having fewer children, and women with young children are more willing to work.

At the same time, the factor which most increases the likelihood that a woman will be employed at some time in her life, the amount of her education, is steadily increasing. Taken together, these trends seem to indicate that more than half the women will be employed in the future.

Women have traditionally been employed in just a few, low paying jobs. Over a quarter of all women are employed in just five occupations: secretary, public elementary school teacher, retail sales clerk, bookkeeper and waitress. In all occupations, women are paid less than men. But this is changing. Equal rights legislation passed during the last decade is beginning to have effect as the government, women's groups, and individual women press for enforcement. Major business firms have recently been forced to pay millions in back pay and wage adjustment settlements and change company policies to provide equal pay and equal opportunities to women workers.

Thus women seeking careers now and in the future face a different market, with many more opportunities, than their mothers faced. Most of their best opportunities will be in fields that have traditionally been considered male fields, for the fact is that women who work in fields that predominantly employ males are paid substantially more than are women who work in fields that predominantly employ women.

The basic socialization forces in our society push women into a highly restricted vision of their role, including a very narrow range of occupations which are considered appropriately "feminine." These beliefs serve to continue to channel women into low-status, low-pay occupations at a time when they can do much better.

Schools are charged with preparing students realistically for their futures. In order to prepare women for their current role, which includes employment, the schools should be acting to counter some of the socialization patterns which prevent girls from acquiring the job training that would do them the most good as adults.

At present, the opposite tends to be the case. The schools heavily reinforce the traditional sex role stereotypes in course offerings, curriculum materials, guidance and counseling programs, and other aspects of school life. The result can be seen in looking at the enrollment patterns of women in vocational education programs. Nationwide, half of all women enrolled in vocational

education are in homemaking courses, another 30% are in office occupations, and another 14% are in other traditionally female fields. Only 8% are receiving training in traditionally male fields, the fields which, on the average, offer women the best opportunities. Analogous sex stereotyped enrollment patterns are found in post-secondary technical schools and in four year colleges.

Clearly, the schools are not preparing women for the real world. Substantial changes are needed. In order to have real impact on this problem the schools must both change current practices which discriminate by sex -- many of which are now illegal under the provisions of Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 -- and also undertake positive efforts to provide realistic information to students and faculty about the changing career patterns of women in the United States.

The following paper substantiates these generalizations, analyzes the issues and presents recommendations for changes in the educational system to make it more responsive to the real needs of women students.

I. WOMEN AND THE LABOR FORCE

More and more women are joining the labor force. In 1948, 32.7% of adult women (16 years old or older) were either employed or actively seeking work. The percentage has increased steadily since that year and by November 1974, 46.3% of adult women were in this category.[1] As of that month, women constituted 39.9% of the labor force.[2]

These changes in the behavior of women appear even more striking if we break down the employment trends by presence of children. Women at all stages of their lives are working more now than they did 25 years ago, but the greatest change is among women with young children.

Women with no children under 18 years of age increased their participation in the labor force from 31.4% in 1950 to 45.7% in 1974, a rise of 45.5% in the percentage working. At the same time, women with children aged 6-17 years increased their participation in the labor force from 32.8% in 1950 to 53.8% in 1974, a rise of 64%. The percentage of women with children under 6 years old who worked rose from 13.6% in 1950 to 36.6% in 1974, a rise of 169%.[3]

A woman with pre-school children at home in 1974 was more likely to be working than was a woman in 1950 who had no children under 18.

The evidence seems strong that the trend toward women's increased participation in the labor force will continue. Not only are women less deterred from working by the presence of children than they used to be, but they are having fewer children.

The crude birth rate (number of children born per year per 1000 population) has dropped from 25.3 in 1957 to 14.8 in 1974. At the current fertility rate, the average family size of women now of childbearing age will be 1.8 children. The lowest it has ever been before in the United States, during the depression of the 1930's, was 2.2.[4]

The working patterns of women are historically related to family size. The fewer children a woman has, the more years she tends to work outside the home.[5]

Thus the demographic trends would seem to indicate that women will be spending even more years of their lives in the labor force in the future than they are at present.

Another social change contributing to the continuing increase in the percentage of women employed is the rising education level. The more highly educated a woman is, the more likely she is to work. Seventy-five percent of women aged 20-54 with only a grade school education have worked at some time in their lives. Eighty-five percent of women who attended high school but did not graduate have worked. Ninety percent of women high school graduates who did not attend college have worked. Ninety-three percent of those who attended college and ninety-six percent of college graduates have worked.[6] In fact, ever having worked is more closely correlated with education that it is with age, number of children, family income or any other variable associated with current employment status. This probably reflects a difference in employability. More highly educated women can, in general, get better jobs and therefore employment is more attractive to them.

The percentage of women aged 18-24 enrolled in college has grown from 7.1% in 1950 in 19.6% in 1972. The percentage of all women over 25 years of age having four or more years of college education has risen from 5% in 1950 to 9% in 1972. Among women aged 25-29, the number holding a college degree has risen from 5.8% in 1950 to 16% in 1972.[7] The trend is expect to continue. According to Department of Labor projections, by 1980 the percentage of women over 25 who are college graduates will be 15.3%. A similar trend is anticipated for high school graduates. By 1980, 46.1% of women over age 25 will be high school graduates, up from 22.6% in 1950 and 34.1% in 1970.[8]

Sex Equality in Employment is Mandated by Law

Women historically have been limited to certain kinds of jobs and have been paid less than men for the same work. In 1970 the average earnings of men was $9,030. The average for women was $4,873. When differences betweeen the sexes in hours worked (accounting for $575 of the earnings disparity), education (accounting for $360), job seniority ($360), and absenteeism ($8) are considered, $2,854, or 68.7% of the disparity, remains unexplained.[9]

Women who have worked full time every year since leaving school earn about 75% as much as men. (Women who have worked only half the years since leaving school earn, when they work, only 23% as much as men.)[10] Women are paid less than men in every job category, and women tend to be concentrated in the lowest paying jobs.[11]

However, legislation now requires that these discriminatory practices end, and these laws are being used with increasing impact.

THE EQUAL PAY ACT OF 1963 prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex in payment of wages for equal work on jobs that require equal skill, effort, and responsibility and are performed under similar working conditions. In July 1972 this protection was extended to executive, administrative, and professional employees and to outside sales personnel. In the landmark court decision of Shultz v. Wheaton Glass[12] the principle was established that the jobs need be only "substantially" equal to fall under the provisions of this law. That is, employers cannot evade this law by introducing trivial differences between the men's and women's jobs.

TITLE VII OF THE CIVIL RIGHTS ACT OF 1964 prohibits discrimination in employment based on sex, race, color, religion, and national origin. A 1972 amendment extended coverage to state and local government agencies and public and private schools. Discrimination is forbidden in hiring or firing; wages; fringe benefits; classifying, referring, assigning, or promoting employees; extending or assigning use of facilities; training; or any terms, conditions, or privileges of employment.

The guidelines issued by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), charged with enforcing Title VII, state that this law supersedes any state "protective" laws which prohibit women from working in certain kinds of jobs or for more than certain hours. The guidelines also bar classifying jobs as "men's jobs" and "women's jobs," and restrict exemptions to a very narrow definition of bona fide occupational qualification (such as, only men can be sperm donors and only women can be wet nurses).

THE EQUAL PAY ACT and TITLE VII were the basis of Government action against the American Telephone and Telegraph Company alleging discrimination which resulted in landmark settlements. In January 1973, AT&T agreed to a settlement requiring $45 million in back pay and wage adjustments to nonmanagement employees and in May, 1974, the company agreed to a settlement requiring $30 million in back pay and wage adjustments to management employees.[13]

EXECUTIVE ORDER 11246, (effective September 24, 1965) which required that all government contracts include provisions forbidding the contractor to discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion or national origin, was amended by EXECUTIVE ORDER 11375 in 1967 to include a ban on sex discrimination. In 1971 the Secretary of Labor and the Director of the Office of Federal Contract Compliance revised regulations to require affirmative action goals and timetables for increasing the representation of women in job categories in which they were underrepresented.

Sex discrimination in educational institutions was addressed directly in TITLE IX OF THE EDUCATION AMENDMENTS OF 1972. The law states that "no persons in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance..."[14]

These laws provide a framework for eliminating sex discrimination in employment. As women seek employment in increasing numbers and as they become more aware of their rights we can expect to see more and more employers forced to ensure that their policies grant equal opportunities to women.

Employment Opportunities Through 1985 Are Mixed

Projecting labor market trends is a delicate business at best. Future job openings depend on so many factors beyond our control, that one can only make a best guess based on trends in the economy visible at the moment. Yet it is a useful exercise to see what the labor market will look like in 1980 or 1985 if currently foreseeable trends continue. The following is a brief discussion of 1974 Department of Labor projections.

Between 1974 and 1985, employment is expected to expand in all fields except household work and farm labor. The most rapid rate of increase will be among professional and technical workers. A larger percentage of workers will be in white collar jobs (47.8% in 1972, 51.5% in 1980, 52.9% in 1985). The rise in white collar jobs is accounted for by the rise in the professional, technical and clerical workforce. The proportion of workers employed as managers, administrators or sales workers is expected to remain about the same.[15]

The expansion of employment, however, will not keep pace with the increased supply of workers looking for white collar jobs. The Department of Labor has made the following projections of growth in the supply and demand for jobs:[16]

TABLE I

Comparison of projected percentage increases in labor force and employment by occupational status group, 1970 to 1980.

Occupational status group	Labor force increase (1)	Employment increase (2)	Difference (1)-(2)
Group I, professional, technical, and kindred	45.3	39.0	6.3
Group II, managerial, clerical, and sales[1]	24.6	21.9	2.7
Group III, craft and kindred (part of)[2]	15.1	16.5	-1.4
Group IV, operatives (part of)[3]	11.0	16.9	-5.9
Group V, laborers (part of)[4]	4.4	10.6	-6.2

[1]Also includes police, fire fighters, and related occupations. Does not include shipping and receiving clerks, messengers, and office helpers.

[2]Includes farmers; operatives in selected higher wage industries, e.g., transportation equipment, chemical, and petroleum; and barbers, bartenders, and practical nurses.

[3]Includes auto mechanics; construction painters, plasterers, cement and concrete finishers, and roofers; selected service occupations, e.g., hospital attendants, waiters, guards, and housekeepers; metalworking industry laborers; and shipping and receiving clerks, messengers and office helpers.

[4]Includes most farm and nonfarm laborers, cooks and kitchen workers, cleaning and building service workers, domestic workers, and laundry and dry cleaning operatives.

There will be a 39% increase in professional and technical jobs, but simultaneously there will be a growth of 45.3% in the number of people seeking those jobs. Likewise, there will be more people seeking managerial, clerical and sales jobs than there will be openings.

However, the situation is the reverse for craft workers. Employment will increase 16.5% while the number of people seeking such jobs will increase only 15.1%. Likewise, the openings for operatives will exceed the supply of workers by a significant amount, and the same holds true for laborers.

Thus people looking for jobs through 1985 should consider craft and industrial jobs, for that is where there will be openings in excess of supply. There will also be expanded employment in managerial, clerical and sales work, but the increased supply will exceed the demand.

Women Should Expand Their Career Horizons

The labor market projections seem to indicate that women preparing for employment would do well to look beyond traditional "women's jobs" and consider the opportunities in previously male fields.

This conclusion is reinforced when we consider the relative wage rates in different fields. The fact is, women who work in fields that are predominantly male earn considerably more money than do women who work in fields that are predominantly female.

The combined effects of discrimination and socialization have caused women to be concentrated in a few, low paying fields. In 1970, half of all women workers were concentrated in just 17 occupations, while one needed 63 occupations to include half of all male workers.[17]

The five largest occupations for women are secretary, sales clerk in retail store, bookkeeper, public elementary school teacher and waitress. These fields employ 25.4% of all women workers. (The five largest occupations

for men -- operative, foreman, truck driver, farmer and janitor -- employ only 14.4% of all male workers.)[18]

Although women, in their most typical jobs, have a higher level of education than men in their most typical jobs, women have substantially lower earnings. Consider the following table of the median annual earnings and median school years completed of women in each of the most popular female occupations in 1969:[19]

TABLE II

Women's annual earnings and median school years completed in each of the most popular female occupations in 1969

	Earnings	Years of school completed
Public elementary school teachers	$6,883	16.6
Secretaries	$4,803	12.7
Bookkeepers	$4,477	12.5
Sales clerks, retail trade	$2,208	12.2
Waitresses	$1,662	11.5

Compare these figures with the equivalent information on men employed in typical male occupations in 1969:[20]

TABLE III

Men's median annual earnings and median school years completed in each of the most popular male occupations in 1969

	Median annual earnings	Median years of school completed
Foremen	$10,018	12.2
Truck drives	7,246	10.5
Operatives	6,896	11.3
Farmers	4,816	10.7
Janitors	4,771	9.9

Women who have been able to break out of the bounds of the traditionally female occupations have been able to achieve substantially higher earnings. A 1974 analysis of the wages received by men and women in all occupations revealed that women who work in predominantly male occupations earn more than women in occupations that are predominantly female. Most of the top paying jobs for women have fewer than 10 percent female workers. At the same time, more than 20% of the occupations with 40% or more female workers pay women less than $2,200 per year, putting them in the bottom decile of female workers.[21]

Thus, for example, in 1969 women railroad and car shop mechanics (a field 99% male) had median annual earnings of $7,230 while women medical secretaries (a field 99% female) had median annual earnings of $4,701.

II. PREPARING WOMEN FOR EMPLOYMENT

Labor market projections and analysis of comparative wage rates indicate that women should consider preparing for a wider range of occupations than they have sought in the past. Higher earnings in traditionally male fields, combined with the expanding enforcement of anti-discrimination legislation, make these fields increasingly attractive.

Yet, at all levels, female students are continuing to enter education programs which either do not prepare them for employment at all or which prepare them only for work in traditional, low paying "female jobs."

Enrollments in Vocational Education Programs Follow Traditional Sex Role Lines

In 1972, the last year in which data on enrollments in vocational education by sex were collected, women constituted a little more than half of all vocational education students nationwide.[22] However, an analysis of these data reveals that 49.5% of the women students were enrolled in homemaking and consumer education courses not intended to prepare them for employment.[23] Thus, nearly half of the women who on paper were training for jobs, in fact were not. Since 90% of all women seek paid employment at some time in their lives, this seems to indicate a serious discrepancy between schooling and the real world.

Most of the remaining female vocational education students were enrolled in programs in traditional female fields. Table IV shows the percentage of female and male vocational education students enrolled in each of the major categories of vocational education courses in 1972, nationwide and in Illinois. (There may well have been some significant progress in realigning enrollments since 1972, however lack of more recent data prevents analysis of later trends).

TABLE IV[24]

Percentage of total vocational education enrollment of each sex enrolled in vocational field of study, nationwide and in Illinois, 1972.

Field of Study	% of total Male Enrollment Nationwide	% of total Male Enrollment Illinois	% of total Female Enrollment Nationwide	% of total Female Enrollment Illinois
Agriculture	18.8%	9.0%	0.8%	0.6%
Distributive	7.8%	4.4%	4.9%	3.5%
Homemaking and Consumer	5.5%	1.3%	49.5%	8.9%
Gainful home economics	0.9%	1.1%	4.1%	16.6%
Office	12.3%	22.5%	30.5%	57.4%
Technical	6.7%	3.6%	0.6%	0.6%
Trade and Industrial	46.9%	7.3%	4.8%	7.0%
Health	1.1%	0.9%	4.8%	5.3%
TOTAL*	100	100	100	100

*Columns may not add to 100% because of rounding.

The second most popular vocational education program (after homemaking) among female students nationwide (30.5%), and the first choice for females in Illinois (57.4%) is office occupations.

In Illinois the second choice is occupational home economics (16.6% of female students). This compares to only 4.1% nationwide. (The high percentage enrolled in occupational home economics in Illinois and the extremely low percentage enrolled in consumer and homemaking (8.9%) is due to the distinctive funding and definitional policies of the Illinois Division of Vocational and Technical Education. As part of a policy to encourage occupational preparation, the Illinois DVTE considers occupational home economics as a vocational education program but supports consumer and homemaking only on a course by course basis.)

If the traditional female fields of homemaking, home economics and office occupations are taken together, they account for 84.1% of female enrollments

in vocational education nationwide and 82.9% of the female vocational education enrollments in Illinois.

Trade and industrial and technical education courses train students in fields for which the employment prospects are bright and the wages, in general, are favorable. Together these courses accounted for 53.6% of all male vocational education enrollments nationwide and 60 9% of male enrollments in Illinois. They enroll very few women. Nationwide, 4.8% of women in vocational education were in trade and industrial education programs and 0.6% were in technical programs. The figures for women in Illinois were 7.0% and 0.6% respectively.

Table V shows the percentage women form of the enrollments in each field. Nationwide, the enrollment in trade and industrial programs is 88.3% male and 11.7% female. In Illinois these programs are 90.4% male and 9.6% female.

Nationwide, technical programs are 90.2% male and 9.8% female. In Illinois, technical programs are 87.4% male and 12.6% female.

TABLE V[25]

Enrollment total and percentage female enrollment in each vocational field of study, nationwide and in Illinois, 1972.

Field of Study	Enrollment Nationwide	% Female Nationwide	Enrollment Illinois	% Female Illinois
Agriculture	896,460	5.4%	30,335	5.5%
Distributive	640,423	45.3%	23,808	40.7%
Health	336,652	84.7%	17,682	82.9%
Homemaking & Consumer	3,165,732	92.1%	28,572	85.8%
Gainful home economics	279,966	86.1%	49,169	93.1%
Office	2,351,878	76.4%	230,303	68.8%
Technical	337,069	9.8%	13,248	12.6%
Trade & Industrial	2,397,968	11.7%	202,762	9.6%

Post-secondary Enrollments Follow Traditional Sex Role Lines

Women who choose to pursue career training in community colleges, post-secondary technical institues and area vocational-technical schools are investing time and money in improving their employability. Yet this subset of women (about 11 percent of vocational education enrollments nationwide) shows the same pattern of anachronistic and self-defeating sex-stereotyped enrollments as the larger group. For example, in 1971, women were 86.5% of the post-secondary students studying to be key punch operaters but there were no women reported studying data-processing equipment maintenance. The enrollment in dental hygiene was 99.3% female while the enrollment in electronics and machine technologies was 99.7% male.[26]

Women who attend four year colleges also tend to restrict themselves to traditionally female career areas. A recent study[27] of 1646 women who were juniors and seniors in college found only 109 who were studying for careers in fields not traditionally considered female. Their choice of occupations is seen in Table VI.

TABLE VI
Career choices of women college students

Career	Number of Students	% of all Students
Traditional:		
Teacher	803	48.8
Counselor, social worker	94	5.7
Nurse or other health	77	4.7
Librarian	28	1.7
Housewife	10	.6
Other traditional	211	12.8
Total	1223	74.3
Non traditional:		
Scientist	20	1.2
Clinical Psychologist	15	.9
Physician	14	.8
Lawyer	11	.7
Government	10	.6
Computers	7	.4
Others	32	1.94
Total	109	6.54
Don't know	314	19.0

In this sample, 74.3% of the women students were planning on careers in traditional fields and only 6.54% were venturing outside, and some of those were not going very far. If we add together the "don't know's", the housewives, and the teachers (many of whom, given the current and projected oversupply of teachers, will not be able to find teaching jobs) we account

for 71.6% of the students. If and when these women try to find jobs, and the odds are most of them will seek jobs at some point, they are likely to be sorely disappointed at what they find.

Thus it seems that the education system is not preparing female students realistically for the lives they are likely to lead. Adult women are increasingly seeking paid employment, but adolescent girls are still choosing courses which either do not prepare them for paid employment at all, or prepare them to work only at low status, low pay jobs.

Why this is so and what can be done to change it is the focus of the next part of this paper.

III. COUNTERPRODUCTIVE INFLUENCES ON WOMEN'S CAREER ASPIRATIONS

Many adolescents hold traditional, outdated beliefs about women. A recent survey of high school seniors found that 22.6% of the girls and 38.9% of the boys believed that "Most girls will become housewives and never work outside the home."[28] Oblivious to changing employment patterns and legal requirements, 29.4% of the girls and 45% of the boys believed that "Women should stick to women's jobs and not compete with men."

It is not surprising that adolescent boys and girls, just beginning to come to terms with their sex roles, should reflect outdated stereotypes. After all, that is still the surface information that the culture purveys.

Parents begin treating the sexes differently from the day of birth. Boys and girls are dressed differently and taught different games. The girls are given dolls and toy ovens and groomed for domestic life while the boys are given toy trucks and tool chests and encouraged to dream of adventurous careers. Television, movies and story books reinforce the stereotypes and rarely, if ever, show women in nontraditional careers.

An extensive literature has grown up documenting the ways in which our culture restricts the career aspirations of women. Girls are taught that most careers are "unfeminine" and that women should not expect to have a serious career at all. The message of the culture is that the only roles a women need prepare for are those of wife and mother. At the same time, boys are growing up believing that <u>their</u> wives will not work outside the home.

One would think that the schools, institutions charged with preparing children for adult life, would provide realistic information to counter these influences. Actually, the schools sometimes act indirectly to reinforce the stereotypes.

<u>Curriculum Materials Reflect Sex Role Stereotypes</u>

Curriculum materials used in schools not only reflect traditional sex stereotypes in our culture, they exaggerate them. In 1972 a women's group did

an extensive analysis of 2,760 stories in 134 children's reading textbooks. They found that men were shown in 147 different jobs and women in only 26, all of them "women's jobs." There were 119 biographies of 88 different men, but only 27 biographies of 17 women. The ratio of stories about boys to stories about girls was 5 to 2. Girls were shown cooking 33 times and cleaning 27 times, while boys were almost never shown doing domestic chores. The most popular room in any house, for a girl, was the kitchen. Stories with themes of ingenuity, creativity, bravery, perseverance, achievement, adventurousness, curiosity, autonomy and self-respect were four times as likely to be about boys as about girls.[29]

American history textbooks were subjected to a similar analysis by a different group. They found the text and illustrations in eight books to be entirely male oriented. For example, a section on the pioneers read: "It was a man's job to tame that wilderness, make it habitable and exploit its riches. In the process of creating a place for himself and his family..." Such an approach implies that pioneer women just sat back and watched, when, in fact, they were hard working tamers of the wilderness themselves. The books mention 1,103 different men and only 33 women. Almost no coverage was given to the women's suffrage movement.[30]

An informal review by Steiger of nine textbooks and curriculum guides for courses in technical occupations revealed sex stereotyping in text and pictures.[31] Students, teachers and workers were all referred to as "he" and photographs show only boys and men in technical occupations. A curriculum guide on metallurgical technology did mention women in the "student selection" section, but with this curious note: "the aptitudes and abilities of women with scientific interests and training peculiarly suit them for much of the analysis and related laboratory work in metallurgical-research and metal-producing organizations" (emphasis added).[32] Apparently the author, having admitted that women could do this work, felt compelled, nonetheless, to treat them as quite different from men who could do the work.

The Guidance and Counseling System Reinforces the Status Quo

Women at all educational levels continue to be counseled into traditional "women's jobs", even though, for many women, those jobs are no longer a good choice. This reflects the challenge that counselors face in dealing with women today. Counselors are trained, and counseling materials are designed, to build on the experience of the past. But if the counselor relies on information from the past, including established tests, in dealing with women, the counselor may give advice that is inapplicable for today or ten years from now.

The controversy over career guidance tests, explored in depth by the National Institute of Education last year, illustrates this problem well. These are tests of likes, dislikes and interests commonly used by guidance counselors to help steer their clients toward appropriate occupations. The tests come in two basic types: "interest inventories," such as the Kuder Occupational Interest Survey[34] and the Strong Vocational Interest Blank,[35] which compare

clients' expressed interest with those of men and women currently employed in various occupations, and instruments such as the "Self-Directed Search,"[36] which assess clients' responses to questions about their interests in terms of certain arbitrarily or empirically determined clusters of responses. Each response cluster is believes to indicate affinity for specific kinds of work or work environments.

In either case, these questionnaires are not aptitude or intelligence tests, or measures of skill or knowledge. Therefore, they can tell little about the ability of a young man or woman to master the skills necessary to hold a job in any given field. What they do purport to tell is whether the respondent possesses inventoried interests in common with those of a certain occupational group (e.g., Most physicians like classical music. Dose the respondent like classical music?) or whether he or she enjoys activities related to certain occupational skills (e.g., The respondent likes to use modeling clay, play baseball and repair old furniture. Therefore, he or she is suited to occupations involving intensive use of the hands.)

Serious questions can be -- and have been -- raised about the value of these instruments in advising anyone, male or female. But their use for women is particularly suspect.

The interests that these tests measure heavily reflect cultural conditioning. For example, a child from a poor family who has never been exposed to classical music will most likely not pick out listening to classical music as an interest. Yet this response lowers his or her rating on the "physician scale" because this is an interest most physicians have. Likewise, few girls are given the opportunity to repair electrical wiring, and so will rarely choose this as an interest. Yet this response lowers their scores for many male-dominated jobs, especially if their scores are compared with male scales.

The interest inventories do provide separate scales for men and women in some fields. That is, women's scores are compared to the scores of women in each occupation rather than to men in the occupation. This is helpful, but there are two problems. First for many fields there are no scales for women. In fact the only interest inventory designed specifically for nonprofessional occupations, the Minnesota Vocational Interest Blank, provides only male scales throughout. Second, because women have been concentrated in so few fields, the women's scales do not differentiate well among professions. Many women have become secretaries or school teachers not because they have any real interest in these fields but because they felt that was all they could do. The scales merely reflect the interest of most women in any given field, not the interests of women who are happy with that kind of work.

An additional problem of women taking the interest inventories is that they tend to project onto the tests their perceived social role, rather than their inclinations. In a study done in 1970, 50 women (all over age 40) first took an interest inventory with no special instructions. They showed typical female response patterns. They were then given the test again with instructions to "pretend" that men and women are promoted equally, that family and career

can be combined, and that men like intelligent women. Their scores changed dramatically.[37]

Thus it seems that women adjust their responses to the questions to reflect the traditional role, rather than responding in ways that disclose their actual aptitudes and ambitions.

The tests scored by clustering answers into patterns show problems analogous to those of the interest inventories. That is, they measure socialization as much as they measure individual interests, and the two kinds of response patterns are difficult to sort out. For example, since all women feel social pressure to show an interest in babies, it is not surprising that most women show interest in child care when they take a test. The question is, does that mean they should be counseled to find a career in child care?

John Holland, creator of the "Self-Directed Search", one of the most popular of these tests, argues that measuring socialization is useful and important. People internalize social pressures and then are really happier doing "appropriate" things.[38] The problem with that argument is that the social pressures are changing. Moreover, the pressures tend to impact with excessive force in a woman's adolescent years, when she is making choices that will affect her earning potential for much of her life. At age 16 a girl may feel it is appropriate for her to be a social worker and inappropriate for her to be a mechanic. By the time she turns 30 she may well feel that the traditional social pressures are simply not very important. (In fact, efforts to attract woman to nontraditional employment have had greatest success among women over 30.[39]) But by that time a critical opportunity to prepare for higher-paying work will have been wasted.

In a time of social change, career guidance tests lag behind the times. They could conceivably be useful, nonetheless, in the hands of counselors who understand the issues facing women choosing careers today. The counselors could use the opportunity to explain socialization and sex role stereotyping. However, there is some evidence that counselors themselves have outdated attitudes. A 1970 study using taped counseling sessions with an actress portraying a woman trying to decide between education and engineering as a career showed considerable bias by both men and women counselors. Both wanted the woman to choose the traditional female field.[40] A 1971 study found that case workers had negative attitudes towards women who combine families and careers.[41]

Women at all educational levels and at all ages continue to be counseled into "female" fields. A program planner at UCLA with many years experience in dealing with mature women at the college level who are seeking employment, said at a recent conference: "Women continue to be counseled into areas of teaching and the behavioral and social sciences. Although we feel practitioners in these fields are extremely valuable to our society, we believe that indications are clear that employment opportunities are rapidly diminishing. We are committed to developing new careers for women and encouraging women to enter traditionally male fields. Based on eight years experience in

designing and presenting programs for women, we feel it is urgent to implement a program which will increase the number of women engineers, architects and managers."[42]

Other Aspects of School Life Reflect Traditional Stereotypes

Program enrollment patterns, curriculum materials and the guidance and counseling systems operate directly on all female students to pressure them to follow stereotypical female career patterns. Other aspects of school organization operate more subtly to reinforce these pressures.

Employment patterns in education, for example, tend to result in males holding all the top positions. In 1971 women were 67.2% of all teachers, 21% of all principals and only 0.6% of all superintendents.[43] The message that this gives students is that women cannot get to the top.

In extracurricular activities, boys are frequently given opportunities denied to girls, such as lab assistant or hall monitor. The disparity in opportunity shows most graphically in the area of athletics. In Waco, Texas, for example, the Women's Equity Action League found that:[44] "With 19,000 students and an athletic program of $250,000 annually for boys, the girls were allowed to participate only in tennis and the program was allotted $970. Girls were prohibited use of $1,000,000 worth of stadiums,athletic fields, equipment and gyms.

An Athletic Committee, composed entirely of men, was appointed last October by the Waco school board to recommend changes in athletic programs and policies. This Committee recommended and received approval for expansion of the present boy's athletic program at an estimated increase of $154,000 annually with no allotment for a girl's program."

This sort of discrimination acts directly to discourage girls considering athletic careers and indirectly to show all students that girls simply are not valued as highly as boys.

In a different way, through nonfeasance rather than malfeasance, the education system discourages mature women from achieveing their career potential. Many women who have left the labor force to raise families desire to acquire further education in order to re-enter the labor force at a higher level. After all, more than 75% of all intellectually qualified youngsters who do not enter college after high school are girls.[45]

These women need guidance and part-time study. They frequently find neither. A recent survey of 454 institutions of higher learning found that less than half made any adjustments in the rate of work, class hours, or customary academic policies or procedures to meet the needs of women with families.[46]

RECOMMENDATIONS

The preparation for employment which the education system at all levels is providing women is inappropriate. If the schools are to prepare women realistically for life today, changes must be made at all levels. The following are a few recommendations for administrators, teachers and counselors.

1. ASSESS THE PROBLEM. Studies of sex stereotyping in occupational and career education, including job placements, should be undertaken at the national, state and local levels.

2. REVISE CURRENT PRACTICES. Any practices which contribute to the problem rather than to the solution should be changed. Encourage all personnel to comply with the spirit as well as the letter of anti-sex-discrimination legislation.

3. DEVELOP MATERIALS AND PROGRAMS FOR STUDENTS. Curriculum materials and courses of study should be designed which will instruct students, male and female, about the changing career patterns of women in the United States and the relative advantages, to women, of seeking careers in male dominated fields. Programs should address both the cognitive and affective aspects of attitudes toward women and work.

4. DEVELOP MATERIALS AND PROGRAMS FOR FACULTY MEMBERS. Inservice training programs and supplementary materials should be developed for administrators, teachers, and guidance counselors and appropriate noninstructional personnel to inform them about the changing career patterns of women and the problem of sex role stereotyping of jobs.

5. IMPLEMENT NEW PROGRAMS. Having developed materials for students and faculty, provide the time and resources necessary for effective implementation. Assess changes in attitudes resulting and revise instruction as indicated.

6. PUBLICIZE SUCCESS. Make others aware of employment opportunities which transcend sex-role stereotypes and publicize successful placements in such jobs. Use in-house publications, public meetings, the press, professional organizations, community organizations, conventions and other opportunities to inform peers and the public about ways in which sex role barriers to employment can be overcome.

FOOTNOTES

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7. Executive Office of the President: Office of Management and Budget. Op. cit., pp. 105-107.

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11. Dixie Sommers. "Occupational Rankings for Men and Women by Earnings." Monthly Labor Review (August 1974) Vol. 97. No. 8, pp. 47-48.

12. Schultz Versus Wheaton Glass Co., 421 F. 2D 259 (1970).

13. Eileen Shanahan, "A. T. & T. Ends Pay Inequity for Managerial Employees." New York Times, May 31, 1974, p. 1.

14. Public Law 92-318, Section 901.

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16. Ibid., p. 111.

17. Ibid., p. 107.

18. Sommers, op.cit., p. 51.

19. Ibid.

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21. Ibid. p. 50.

22. U.S. Department of Health Education and Welfare, Office of Education, Division of Vocational and Technical Education. Vocational and Technical Education, Selected Statistical Tables, 1972. U.S. Government Printing Office, 1972, p.31.

23. Ibid. p. 34-41.

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25. Ibid.

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28. Peggy W. Patrick, "Education and Counseling Status Report of Young Men and Women: A Survey of Senior Students from Fourteen Public Secondary Schools in Arkansas." Governor's Commission on the Status of Women, Little Rock, Arkansas, Dec. 1972.

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42. The Continuum Center, "Proceedings of the Multi-Faceted Women's Center Conference" Oakland University, Rochester, Michigan., Oct. 1973. p. 31.

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